



Aboriginal news from across Turtle Island and beyond
IDLE NO MORE SPECIAL

Idle No More movement sets social media ablaze

[The Star](#)

December 20, 2012

Tanya Talaga



DAVE CHIDLEY/THE CANADIAN PRESS Aboriginal drummers play in an intersection in downtown London, ont. during a protest on Wednesday. Demonstrations by the Idle No More movement are expected across Canada Friday.

The grassroots [Idle No More movement begun by native and non-native women](#) three weeks ago is expected to erupt across Canada on Friday with teach-ins, protests and flash mob dances.

Jessica Gordon, Sheelah McLean, Sylvia McAdams and Nina Wilson, all of Saskatchewan, may be credited with initiating Idle No More after posting their discontent with federal omnibus budget legislation on Facebook.

But then the outcry spread like fire through social media. By means of Twitter and Facebook, young First Nations and non-First Nations people alike have started a nationwide conversation on everything from treaty rights to youth unemployment, resource extraction and inadequate housing and education.

Once the hunger strike by Attawapiskat First Nation Chief Theresa Spence was thrown into the mix, a movement was born. Spence is carrying out her hunger strike, which began Dec. 11, while living in a teepee on Victoria Island in the Ottawa River, between Ottawa and Gatineau, Que.

Attawapiskat resident Charles Hookimaw puts it bluntly: Youth are fed up because "there is no action. There is always a target to do something and when we get to that target, nothing happens. Young people are tired of it."

Tanya Kappo of Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation met with McAdams and they talked about Bill C-45, the omnibus budget bill that alters the Indian Act, Kappo decided they should take the conversation to Twitter. She began with a simple post on Nov. 30, introducing the hashtag #Idlenomore, which has lit up Twitter, and asked people to join her.

And they have. On Friday, demonstrations of support are expected to take place as far away as the United States and Egypt.

"It has been less than a month and look at it," Kappo said Thursday.

"This has been a lifelong thing for me. It isn't that one day I've woken up and become socially conscious," says Kappo, a recent law graduate at the University of Manitoba and the mother of three.

Anishinabe writer Hayden King, an assistant professor of politics at Ryerson University, said it's exciting to see First Nations people's creativity and voices spreading all over social media.

"Native people like to use Facebook but it has moved to Twitter in a political way," he said. "It is like a fire and it hasn't stopped. It keeps raging People are talking about it all over the world."

There are many issues at play, King said. "It is important to note the diversity and complexity of the demographics and concerns. There are a lot of people out there saying lets get rid of the Indian Act and use our treaty to have relationships There are urban people saying they want to address missing and murdered women, those that disappear from our streets, or others that want to address racism and education."

Native people have a history of activism, he said. "History is punctuated by these confrontations that vary in degree from peaceful protests to blockading highways to physical confrontations. This is kind of the latest string in all of them. This just indicates we haven't been able to get the relationship right yet."

Six Nations lawyer Aaron Detlor noted the movement "isn't necessarily cause-specific."

"It is somewhat of an organic initiative started by an alliance on social media. It is not necessarily a classically, leadership driven undertaking. The people behind it represent a broader, horizontal constituency than what are normally referred to as First Nations political elites," Detlor said.

There are shades of the Occupy movement in Idle No More, he said — a broad, diffuse, social movement that does not have a specific centre of power or control.

"And that is somewhat consistent with aboriginal decision-making," he said.

First Nations lawyers behind the movement are frustrated by what it take to work in the Canadian system to bring about change, he said, and Prime Minister Stephen Harper's "agenda" has helped crystallize this frustration.

"It is the first time it has really taken root that maybe the solution isn't to work within the normal avenues made available to First Nations, for example, the courts and land claims," he said.

Idle no more protesters march through Edmonton

[AM 639 CHED](#)

Scott Johnston

12/21/2012



The Harper government is going to face a court challenge to its legislation, if Friday's Idle No More protests are any indication.

"We just heard an announcement from Chief (Steve) Courtoreille of the Mikisew Cree First Nation," said Melina Laboucan-Massimo of the Lubicon Cree after she climbed down from a flatbed after addressing a crowd of about 400 in Churchill Square.

"He's basically going to appeal bill C-45...and he's going to ask other first nations to join him as well, and he's going to put together the best legal team that he can as he made the announcement out of parliament as he went there to support Chief Spence in her eleven day fast."

"I think it's pretty encouraging because I think it shows that we have a legal stance and I think that it needs to be challenged in the courts."



Photos by: iNews880's Scott Johnston

"I think what the Harper government was hoping to do that this would be put through and the 400 pages in the omnibus bill and not get challenged. But here we see people rising up across the country saying no it's not okay and change legislation and also change our treaties which are the foundation of Canada."

The protesters claim Bill C-45 will make significant changes to the Indian Act, as well as weaken environmental protection for waterways.

They marched through the streets of Edmonton stopping in Rosedale Flats before moving up from the river valley into downtown.

Idle No More movement pays visit to Strahl's office

[Chilliwack Times](#)

December 24, 2012

Paul J. Henderson



Sto:lo members drum and sing inside Mark Strahl's constituency office Friday. Photograph by: Paul J. Henderson, TIMES

Dozens of Sto: lo Nation members and supporters marched to Chilliwack-Fraser Canyon MP Mark Strahl's constituency office Friday morning as part of a nationwide First Nations protest.

Approximately 20 of the 60 people in attendance jammed into Strahl's foyer

and waiting room drumming and singing as part of Idle no More, a local version of a protest that began as an exercise in social media and grew to a national movement.

The focus for the day was the federal government's omnibus budget legislation Bill C-45, which includes provisions that affect the Indian Act and the Navigable Waters Protection Act.

But the main complaint from protesters was a lack of government consultation with aboriginal people.

"This won't be the last time," Skwah First Nation member Eddie Gardner said in Strahl's office. "We aren't going to stop until our aboriginal rights are considered."

Strahl was not in his office, so protesters directed their message to his constituency assistant Matthew Barker.

Former Yukon MLA and Sto: lo member Margaret Commodore had a message for Barker.

"I would like you to tell Mark Strahl that he represents the Sto: lo Nation in the house of Parliament," said Commodore, who served as a New Democrat representative for two Whitehorse ridings from 1982 to 1996.

"Mark Strahl has not spoken up against this racist legislation and we want to know why."

"Let him know that Sto: lo territory is a Bill C-45 free zone," Gardner added.

Grand Chief Clarence Pennier spoke at an Idle No More preparatory meeting and information session held earlier in the week. Pennier was not at Friday's march but on Thursday he told the Times about his concerns with Bill C-45.

"The government is supposed to be consulting-that has come out of a Supreme Court of Canada decision- when they make changes that impact on us," Pennier said. "That is what they are supposed to do and they are not doing it."

While Strahl wasn't present Friday, he did respond via email to a Times request to comment on Idle No More.

"Provisions in Bill C-45, Jobs and Growth Act, 2012 have been debated in the House of Commons, committee and media for eight months," he said in part. "The purpose of the bill is to help all Canadians including First Nations to better pursue and seize economic opportunities."

Strahl said the amendments will provide flexibility for First Nations to engage in economic development, and reduce red tape for development on reserve lands.

As to the concerns about perceived reduction in environmental protection, Strahl said the changes regarding waterways govern navigation and not environmental protection.

"Bodies of water such as the Vedder River and Fraser River will continue to be protected through the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012, the Canadian Environmental Protection Act and the Fisheries Act," he said.

Bill C-45 passed earlier this month despite attempts by the opposition to stall or kill the legislation. Among other items in the massive bill are changes to public sector pensions, pay raises for judges and an electronic travel authorization system.

Since the bill has already passed, Pennier was asked what was the point of the protest.

"It's meant to give a message to the Prime Minister that he didn't do the things he is supposed to do in terms of the Indian Act and the Fisheries Act," he said.

"So, it's something that we have to do because it's part of our responsibility to look after our land water and air; it's why we were placed on this Earth as Sto: lo."

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How the Idle No More movement started and where it might go from here

[National Post](#)

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Tristin Hopper



Dave Chidley / The Canadian Press
People from Aamjiwnaang First Nation continue their blockade of the CN St. Clair Spur line in Sarnia.

In this occasional feature, the National Post tells you everything you need to know about a complicated issue. Today, Tristin Hopper gets to the bottom of the Aboriginal protest movement Idle No More.

What exactly is Idle No More?

Conceived in November by four Saskatchewan women frustrated with the Tories' latest omnibus budget bill, Idle No More is a First Nations protest movement looking to obtain renewed government guarantees for treaty agreements and halt what organizers see as a legislative erosion of First Nations rights. The movement's most visible spokeswoman is Theresa Spence, chief of the Attawapiskat First Nation, the Northern Ontario reserve struck by an emergency housing crisis last year. Since Dec. 11, Ms. Spence has been on a hunger strike while camped on an Ottawa River island only a few hundred metres from Parliament Hill, vowing not to eat until she has secured a meeting with Prime Minister Stephen Harper. Since early December, protests spurred by Idle No More have included a 1,000-person demonstration on Parliament Hill last week, a blockade of a CN rail spur near Sarnia that continued for a sixth day on Wednesday and a variety of brief demonstrations and blockades across Canada and parts of the United States.

Although Idle No More trended on social media over the holidays, has there been much non-virtual movement of late?

Protests largely quieted down over Christmas, although on Boxing Day scattered demonstrations were seen at malls in the Prairie provinces, Sarnia remains blockaded and Theresa Spence still has not eaten. On Wednesday, Ms. Spence received endorsements from the two frontrunners in the Liberal leadership race, Marc Garneau and Justin Trudeau. Mr. Trudeau met with Ms. Spence in her Victoria Island teepee, while Mr. Garneau released a letter calling for Mr. Harper to build "renewed understanding" with Canada's First Nations.



*Cole Burston / The Canadian Press*Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence talks with her family and Native American actor Adam Beach and daughter Phoenix Beach as she continues her hunger strike in a teepee on Victoria Island in Ottawa on Tuesday.

The crux of the protest is ensuring that treaty rights are respected. Are treaty rights being disrespected?

Ontario, the three Prairie Provinces as well as large parts of British Columbia and the Northwest Territories all sit on land that First Nations people signed over to Canada in exchange for a package of government guarantees. Treaty 9, the 1905/1906 treaty signed the people of Attawapiskat, for instance, guarantees that, in perpetuity, First Nations would receive "benefits that served to balance anything that they were giving." The treaty also guaranteed total Aboriginal control over reserve lands. Idle No More organizers point to the disastrous

state of Aboriginal health and living conditions on First Nations reserves and allege that these treaty rights are not being properly honoured — and that current attempts to amend the Indian Act will only erode existing Aboriginal rights. “Canada has not committed itself to addressing the colonial relationship it still has with indigenous peoples,” wrote Metis blogger Chelsea Vowel earlier this month. “I think it’s fair to say that most Canadians believe that kind of relationship no longer exists. We are trying to tell you that you are wrong.”

How wide is support for the protests among Canada’s First Nations?

Not all First Nations protests are created equal. In the past, several high-profile demonstrations such as the 2007 blockade of Ontario’s Highway 401 or Aboriginal protests surrounding the 2010 Vancouver Olympics were conducted by fringe groups with little or no official ties to the groups they claimed to represent. Idle No More’s protests, on the other hand, have received the official backing of First Nations groups and leaders across Canada, including Assembly of First Nations grand chief Shawn Atleo, who has often been noted for advocating close co-operation between Aboriginals and the Tory government.

Nova Scotia Idle No More: Fasts To Be Held On Two Nova Scotia Reserves

[The Canadian Press](#)

12/27/2012 9:59 am EST



First Nations members take part in an "Idle No More" rally in Espanola, Ont., on Saturday, December 22, 2012. (THE CANADIAN PRESS/HO - Isadore Day)

MILLBROOK, N.S. - Members of the Mi'kmaq First Nation will begin a four-day fast today in support of a northern Ontario chief staging a hunger strike near Parliament Hill.

Organizer Shelley Young says as many as 200 people could take part in fasts on Nova Scotia's Millbrook and Eskasoni reserves.

Young says by taking part participants will be sending a message that they want Prime Minister Stephen Harper to meet with Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence.

Spence has been on a hunger strike since Dec. 11 in an attempt to draw attention to aboriginal issues and to force a meeting with the prime minister.

Young says fasts are also being organized in other parts of Canada and are open to anyone who wants to take part.

The Nova Scotia fasts will be held until noon on Dec. 31.

Regina Idle No More demonstrators fasting to support Chief Theresa Spence

[The Leader-Post](#)

December 27, 2012

Vanessa Brown



(L-R) Evening Star, Shawna Ochoo, Pam Horsefall and Claudette Alexson are four of around 10 women beginning a four-day fast Thursday in support of Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence. Spence is on a hunger strike in Ottawa until Prime Minister Stephen Harper and a representative of the Crown agree to meet with her over aboriginal rights. Photo taken in Regina on Dec. 27, 2012. Photograph by: Don Healy, Regina Leader-Post

REGINA — About 10 female Idle No More supporters are honouring Theresa Spence's hunger strike with a four-day fast in Regina.

The chief of the Attawapiskat First Nation in northern Ontario began her hunger strike near Parliament Hill two weeks ago. She is calling on Prime Minister Stephen Harper to meet with her and other First Nations leaders to discuss aboriginal rights.

Shawna Ochoo helped organize the Regina fast that begins Thursday evening and is to end Sunday. It is being held in an undisclosed location on the outskirts of the city. A celebratory feast is planned for Monday.

"It's to stand in solidarity with Chief Theresa Spence, and also to pray for good, peaceful protests that will hopefully urge the Harper government to come back to the table to do the honourable thing and consult with our leaders before passing legislation," Oochoo said in an interview Thursday before beginning the fast.

The international Idle No More aboriginal rights movement began in Saskatchewan earlier this month with protests against the federal omnibus budget bill, which aboriginal leaders say relaxes environmental legislation and was drafted without First Nations consultation.

The Regina fast is the latest Saskatchewan event, and follows more round-dance flash mobs held Boxing Day in Regina and in other cities across the Prairies.

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-With a file from The Canadian Press

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What's at stake for First Nations communities involved in the Idle No More movement

[Global News and the Canadian Press](#)

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*Chiefs and members of the First Nations try to push their way into the House of Commons as they are restrained by House of Commons guards on Parliament Hill in Ottawa; Tuesday December 4; 2012. First Nations activists across Canada are gearing up for a week of rallies as part of a growing grassroots movement known as Idle No More. **Photo Credit:** Fred Chartrand, The Canadian Press*

Statements from concerned politicians, a series of road blockades and hunger strikes are sweeping the country as the national Idle No More movement crosses Canada.

Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence has been on a [hunger strike near Parliament Hill](#) since Dec. 11 to draw attention to aboriginal issues.

These protesters -- who are part of the national Idle No More movement -- are denouncing the Harper government's omnibus [Bill C-45](#), which they claim eliminates treaty and aboriginal rights set out in the Constitution.

Take a look at what's at stake for [First Nations communities](#) and why they're protesting.

Breaking down Bill C-45 & Idle No More

The Indian Act

Idle No More spokesperson Eriel Deranger says the bill includes changing the procedures that lead up to the removal of land. Basically, she says, the amendments makes federal removal of land easier. In the past, she explains, referendums were required for land removal proposals, and the referendums had to include all members of a First Nation. Now, she says, either a meeting or a referendum must be called, and the majority vote at that meeting decides the result, no matter how few people are at the meeting. In addition, says Deranger, the Minister can call a meeting himself for the removal of land.

The Navigable Waters Protection Act

The Navigable Waters Protection Act would become the Navigation Protection Act. Changes to the law would see thousands of lakes and streams removed from federal protection. Critics say that move takes away environmental oversight of the waterways.

"Important lakes and rivers in my region are being stripped of protection," NDP MP Glen Thibeault has said. Thibeault represents the Sudbury, Ontario riding.

The Harper government said the changes would streamline regulation and reduce red tape that was holding up projects along waterways. Transportation Minister Denis Lebel added many waterways will still be covered by environmental protection under other laws.

However, Idle No More supports fear the changes to the Navigable Waters Protection Act remove protection of more than 99.9 per cent of lakes and rivers in Canada, says Deranger.

"It's a direct violation of treaty rights," she adds. "Lakes and rivers are often the centre and focal point of communities."

The Environmental Assessment Act

Deranger says the Environmental Assessment Act has been weakened under the new bill. She says now, certain projects don't have to go through a significant review process, including those that involve natural resource extraction.

"The Idle No More movement came about because [the bill] had drastic impacts on aboriginal rights," she explains, "but not only our rights, but on Canadian democracy."

The changes in Bill C-45 would also eliminate the Hazardous Materials Information Review Commission, which is an independent body responsible for making science-based decisions to protect Canadians from toxic chemicals and hazardous materials in the workplace.

The Fisheries Act

Critics say the Fisheries Act and the Hazardous Materials Information Review Act were critical laws that were used to support environmental stewardship, clean water and healthy oceans for all Canadians. They say the changes included in the omnibus bill would further weaken Canada's environmental laws, remove critical federal safeguards, and reduce the amount of public consultation and input on projects that impact the environment and ecosystem. Critics argue the changes to the Fisheries Act would give industry the option of asking that their existing commitments to protect fish habitat be changed or cancelled, or that they no longer be responsible for providing compensation for lost or damaged habitat.

Deranger says the biggest concern with changes to this law is that "aboriginal fishing rights" were added to the Fisheries Act. However, she says, those same rights are already included in Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution. Idle No More supporters worry that this addition means the Conservative government could be considering removing Section 35 from the Constitution.

"The concern is that if the government is able to push this bill through... it could completely erode our democratic rights in our country," adds Deranger.

More on Idle No More

The Idle No More campaign was started by four women from Saskatchewan against a number of bills before Parliament. They are particularly critical of Bill C-45, which they say weakens environmental laws.

"We started discussing that and felt that we need to bring attention to this legislation," said Jessica Gordon, who lives in Saskatoon.

Jan O'Driscoll, a spokeswoman for Aboriginal Affairs Minister John Duncan, said the department has made efforts to consult with aboriginal leaders. He said they continue work on pressing issues on reserves like education, clean drinking water and housing.

"While we've made significant strides, there is still work to be done," O'Driscoll said in an email.

"We'll continue to partner with First Nations to create the conditions for healthier,

more self-sufficient communities."

What the politicians are saying

On Wednesday, Liberal MP Justin Trudeau visited Spence in a teepee on an island in the Ottawa River that many aboriginals consider to be sacred land.

Trudeau tweeted afterwards that it was "deeply moving" to meet Spence. He said the chief is "willing to sacrifice everything for her people" and that "she shouldn't have to."

In a letter posted on his website, Liberal leadership candidate Marc Garneau calls on Prime Minister Stephen Harper to meet with Spence.

"You cannot continue to ignore this request," wrote Garneau. "This is not a question of not wanting to set a precedent."

On Tuesday, Aboriginal Affairs Minister John Duncan expressed concern for Spence's health and urged her to end her protest.

Spence is seeking a meeting with the prime minister, the governor general and First Nations leaders to discuss the government's relationship with First Nations.

With files from Emily Mertz, Global News